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ABSTRACT

Analogue studies have demonstrated that clients who have been instructed to try to deliberately produce certain impressions in their counselors are able to create those impressions reliably and to affect the counselors' evaluations of the clients. It has not been demonstrated, however, that actual clients engage in strategic self-presentation with their counselors. This study tested that proposition with high school students (N=113) enrolled in junior- and senior-level sociology classes. The students completed an adjective checklist which was designed for this study and which consisted of three sets of adjectives (scales) which were developed to detect the self-presentation strategies of supplication, intimidation, and self-promotion. Subjects were divided into four groups, three of which were led to anticipate meeting with a counselor (a male, a female, or sex unspecified). These subjects also completed the Counselor Rating Form-Short (CRF-S) in anticipation of meeting with the counselor. Differences in the self-presentations among the groups were tested using the MANOVA procedures. In general, subjects who anticipated meeting with a counselor did not self-present differently from those who would not be meeting with a counselor. However, among subjects who did expect to meet a counselor, those expecting to meet with a female counselor presented themselves as less self-promoting and intimidating. No differences among subjects' CRF-S ratings (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertness) of their anticipated counselor were found. (Author/ABL)

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# CLIENT USE OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN COUNSELING

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CLIENT USE OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN COUNSELING

Abstract

Analogue studies have demonstrated that "clients" who have been instructed to try to deliberately produce certain impressions in their "counselors" are able to create those impressions reliably and to affect the "counselors'" evaluations of the "clients" (Schwartz, et al. 1986). It has not been demonstrated, however, that actual clients engage in strategic self-presentation with their counselors. The present study tested this proposition. Forty-eight male and 65 female (N=113) high school juniors and seniors were divided into four groups; all completed an adjective checklist which was designed for this study and which consisted of three sets of adjectives (scales) which were developed to detect the self-presentation strategies of supplication, intimidation, and self-promotion. Ss in three of the groups were led to anticipate meeting with a counselor (a male, a female, or sex unspecified). These Ss also completed the CRF-S (Corrigan & Schmidt, 1983) in anticipation of meeting the counselor. The fourth group was not told that they would meet with a counselor. Differences in the self-presentations among the groups were tested using MANOVA procedures. In general, Ss who anticipated meeting with a counselor did not self-present differently from those who would not be meeting with a counselor. However, among Ss who did expect to meet with a counselor, Ss expecting to meet with a female counselor, presented themselves as less self-promoting and intimidating. No differences among Ss' CRF-S ratings (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertness) of their anticipated counselor were found.

# CLIENT USE OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN COUNSELING

## Introduction

Within counseling and psychotherapy literature there has appeared an increasing interest in conceptualizing the therapeutic encounter as one which involves social influence in general, and impression management in particular (Friedlander & Schwartz, 1985; Strong, 1982; Strong & Claiborn, 1982). While early theorizing regarding the social influence in counseling reflected a unidirectional focus with regard to influence processes--addressing rather exclusively the role of the counselor in influencing the client and the therapeutic process, more recent writing in the area of social influence has recognized and focused upon the bidirectional or reciprocal nature of influence within the social interaction processes (Claiborn & Lichtenberg, 1989; Strong, 1982; Strong & Claiborn, 1982). In this regard, the substantial findings of counselor influence on the counseling process (see Corrigan, Dell, Lewis & Schmidt, 1980; Heppner & Claiborn, 1989; Heppner & Dixon, 1981) notwithstanding, Friedlander and Schwartz (1985) have asserted that clients (as do counselors) use strategic self-presentations to influence and control the counselor and the counseling relationship.

In a bidirectional model of social interaction and influence, both the counselor and client are seen as simultaneously attempting to influence each other. The theory proposed by Strong (1982) argues that counselors and clients are, like anyone else, proactive agents who seek their maintenance and growth through actively controlling others in interpersonal relationships--to control and manipulate the environment to render it to their own purposes. This is not to say that either counselors or clients are self-serving in an underhanded way, but rather simply that individuals seek to maximize positive outcome for themselves through their interactions with others.

Although much has been written about how counselors influence clients (cf. Corrigan, et al., 1980; Heppner & Claiborn, 1989), much less has been written about the means by which clients seek to influence and control counselors. Strong (1982) has contended that clients' efforts to control the counseling relationship are instances of "self-presentational" behaviors or "impression management" tactics and strategies. Impression management here refers to attempts, conscious or

unconscious, to project in a controlled manner, the images or impressions others form in social interactions. A large body of research supports the contention that people manage the impression that others form about their personal characteristics and about their causes of their behavior (Gaes, Kalle, & Tedeschi, 1978; Gaes & Tedeschi, 1978; Kane, Joseph, & Tedeschi, 1976; Rivera & Tedeschi, 1976; Tedeschi, Horai, Lindskold, & Faley, 1970; Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971), and that observers are readily influenced by actor's self-presentations (Carlston & Shova, 1983; Tetlock, 1980; Ward, Friedlander, Schoen, & Klein, 1985).

It has been argued that symptomatic behaviors presented by clients in counseling can be interpreted as maladaptive strategies for interpersonal control (Haley, 1963; Strong & Claiborn, 1982; Claiborn & Lichtenberg, 1989), and that it is the role of the counselor to circumvent their clients' strategies and to alter these maladaptive behavioral styles. Haley (1963) and Kiesler (1981) have argued that if this does not occur, the counseling interaction will simply maintain client symptoms. Therefore, it is critical for counselors to recognize the symptomatic self-presentation and impression management strategies their clients use and to avoid and thwart their clients' symptomatic control strategies through the use of therapeutic impression management strategies of their own.

Borrowing impression management constructs from Jones and Pittman (1982), Friedlander and Schwartz argue that self-promotion, intimidation, and supplication are three impression management strategies used by clients to influence their counselors. Self-promotion is used to create the impression of competence, whereas intimidation is used to convince the counselors that the intimidator is dangerous and to be feared. Supplication is used to create the impression of helplessness and weakness, and seeks to elicit nurturance from the counselor.

In their study of impression management in counseling, Schwartz, Friedlander and Tedeschi (1986) used a counseling analogue design to study the effects of client self-presentations on counselor impressions of their clients. Using audio tapes of role played clients, the researchers demonstrated that counselors' impressions of their clients could be manipulated and managed by the modifying the clients' self-presentations. Although Braginski and his colleagues (Braginski, Grosse, & King, 1966; Braginski & Braginski, 1967) and Fontana and his colleagues (Fontana & Klein, 1968; Fontana, Klein, Lewis, & Levine, 1968) have provided some evidence of impression management among mental patients, it has remained to be



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tested whether clients in counseling actually moderate their self-presentations in an attempt to influence their counselor through impression management.

In light of the above, the purpose of this study was to experimentally test this assumption which is so central to the theory of strategic self-presentation as applied to therapy. Basically, the study extended the counseling analogue of Schwartz et al. (1986) and addressed the question of whether clients actually do exhibit impression management strategies in counseling. More specifically, the study addressed the question of whether clients, as a function of their sex and their knowledge of the sex of their future counselor, would vary the way they present themselves via self-descriptive adjectives, which ostensibly would be reviewed by their assigned counselor prior to the beginning of their counseling. A secondary purpose of this study was to investigate the possible relationship between clients' ratings of their anticipated therapists' expertness, trustworthiness and attractiveness and their use of impression management.

## Method

### Subjects

Forty-eight male and 65 female midwest high school students (N=113), enrolled in junior- and senior-level sociology classes participated in the study. They ranged in age from 15-20 years, and had a mean age of 17.22 (SD=.97).

### Instruments

Impression Management Scale (IMS). This 73-item scale was developed in a pilot study using the 300 items of the Adjective Checklist (ACL; Gough & Heilbrun, 1965). Using 10 graduate students in psychology, the ACL was administered under three different sets of instructions. Specifically, these students were asked to identify the items from the ACL which would reflect their behavior, thoughts or feelings if they themselves were trying to create the impression of (1) supplication, (2) intimidation, and (3) self-promotion. Items judged by at least 2/3 of the students as reflective of a particular self-presentation construct were included in the subscale for that construct. This resulted in a 16-item supplication subscale, a 21-item intimidation subscale, and a 36-item self-promotion subscale. The internal consistency of the full IMS (=.92) was estimated using Cronbach's alpha. The internal consistency coefficients of the individual subscales were: self-promotion (.92), intimidation (.82), and supplication (.63). A subject's score on each subscale was the number of adjectives endorsed on that scale. The presence of impression

management was determined on the basis of differences in subscale scores across experimental conditions (see Procedure below).

Standard Counseling Research Form (SCRF). This form consisted of two parts: The first section gathered general demographic information on each subject (age, grade, sex, etc.). It also included a manipulation check item, which asked subjects to identify the sex of their assigned counselor (male, female, unknown, not applicable). This latter piece of information was use to verify that the subjects had received the experimental manipulation (i.e., type of information about their counselor; see Procedure below).

Counselor Rating Form-Short (CRF-S; Corrigan & Schmidt, 1983). The CRF-S generally has been used to assess clients' post-interview perceptions of their counselors in terms of expertness, trustworthiness and attractiveness. Corrigan and Schmidt (1983) report CRF-S subscale reliabilities ranging from .82 to .93. Higher scores on the scales suggest greater perceived levels of counselor attributes of expertness, trustworthiness and attractiveness. In the present study, Ss ratings were obtained prior to their expected meeting with a counselor and were intended to reflect subjects' expectancies about their assigned counselor.

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory--State Form (STAI-S; Speilberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1970). The STAI-S is a 20 item instrument presented using a 4-point Likert format. It measures general state or situational anxiety. Reliability and validity of the STAI-S have been adequately demonstrated (Dreger & Katkin, 1978; Speilberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1968, 1970). Friedlander and Schwartz (1985) and Deaux and Major (1987) have hypothesized that strategic self-presentations are more likely to be invoked under conditions of novelty and/or conflict and anxiety. In this regard, the STAI-S was used to investigate the possible relationship between anxiety and the Ss use of impression management.

Design and Procedure

The study used a 2x4 factorial design. The first factor was subject sex (male, female). The second factor was the four levels of the experimental manipulation: (1) In the "male counselor" condition, Ss (N=32; 12 males, 20 females) were presented with a written description (a "biographical sketch") of their counselor as male. (2) In the "female counselor" condition, Ss (N=24; 10 males, 14 females) were presented with the identical written description, except that the personal pronouns used in describing the counselor were changed from masculine pronouns (he, him) to feminine pronouns (she, her). (3) In the "sex unspecified" condition, the same

counselor description was provided to Ss (N=31; 16 males, 15 females) but without gender reference. (4) Finally, in the "no counselor" (control) condition, Ss (N=26; 10 males, 16 females) were provided with no information about a counselor; and these Ss were not led to believe they would be meeting with a counselor.

Ss were assigned to one of the four experimental conditions by class section in order to minimize the chances that they would compromise the study by passing on information about the study (esp. "counselor" sex) to others in their school. Ss were provided with a cover letter with instructions, a consent form, and a brief biographical sheet on "Dr. Walker," their assigned "counselor." (NOTE: No counselor was actually assigned to the subjects for purposes of the study. This was instead a deception which was a deliberate part of the study.) The cover letter for the "no counselor" condition was identical to that in the other three conditions except that reference to meeting with a counselor was deleted, and no biographical sheet on the "counselor" was provided.

The cover letter, consent form, and (except for the "no counselor" condition) the biographical sketch were read to the student Ss in their respective class sections (i.e., treatment conditions) to assure their attention to the fact that (a) they were (or were not) to be meeting with a counselor, and (b) if meeting with a counselor, that they knew the counselor's sex. Upon their completion of the consent form, Ss in the three counselor-present conditions were asked to sign-up for an appointment time with the counselor. All Ss were then asked to complete the IMS, SCRF, STAI-S and CRF instruments. The Ss were told (and it appeared in their written materials) that their counselor would be reviewing their responses on the instruments prior to meeting with the student. Upon completing the forms, Ss were debriefed about the study.

With regard to the IMS, it was hypothesized that Ss would present themselves differently when expecting a counselor as opposed to not expecting one. That is, the expectation of a counselor would render salient the need to strategically self-present in order to control the ensuing counseling relationship (Strong & Claiborn, 1982); but when a counselor was not expected, the need to manage impression should not arise because there is no relationship to control. It was also hypothesized that the sex of the anticipated counselor would affect Ss' self-presentation-- specifically that Ss would indicate more supplication with a female counselor. Further, it was hypothesized that sex of the subject would affect self-presentation--with male Ss reporting greater intimidation and self-promotion, and less supplication than female Ss. Finally, it was hypothesized that there would be a significant subject x counselor

gender interaction effect, with male and female Ss describing themselves differently under the male and female counselor conditions.

With regard to the CRF-S, it was hypothesized that counselors whose gender was not specified would receive different ratings from those whose gender was specified. When analyzing only those Ss for whom counselor gender was specified, it was hypothesized that anticipated male and female counselors would receive different ratings by the Ss, and that male and female Ss would differ in their rating of their counselors (regardless of counselor gender), and that there would be an interaction effect between subject gender and the gender of the anticipated counselor on the CRF-S ratings.

Although intended only as an exploratory analysis, it was hypothesized that Ss who expected to see a counselor would evidence more state anxiety on the STAI than those in the no-counselor control condition.

## Results

Table 1 summarizes the Ss means and standard deviations on the IMS subscales by experimental condition.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Because Ss could manage impressions either by endorsement or non-endorsement of IMS items (which would result in impression management being evidenced by scores which could be either higher or low than those in the control [no-counselor] condition), the first hypothesis was tested using the full 2 x 4 design. The results of the 2 (sex of subject) x 4 (experimental condition) MANOVA on the supplication, self-promotion and intimidation subscales of the IMS revealed a significant main effect for treatment condition, $F\ (9,305) = 1.87$, $p<.05$. No main effect was found for sex of subject, nor was their there a significant sex x counselor interaction effect. Post hoc analyses revealed that Ss who anticipated meeting with a female counselor presented differently from those in the male counselor, gender unspecified, and no counselor conditions. Univariate analyses revealed a significant treatment condition effect for the IMS scales of self-promotion, $F\ (1,112) = 4.77$, $p<.05$, and intimidation, $F\ (1,112) = 3.06$, $p<.05$. For both of these scales, Ss appeared to engage in significantly less self-promotion and intimidation when expecting to meet with a female counselor.

The data were reanalyzed using a 2 (sex of subject) x 2 (counselor vs no-counselor experimental condition, collapsing across the previous three counselor conditions), in order to investigate whether Ss' who anticipated seeing a counselor would differ in their self-presentations from those who did not anticipate meeting with a counselor. No evidence was found for Ss using impression management when anticipating that they would meet with a counselor, $F(3, 107) = 2.15$, NS. Neither was an effect found for sex of subject; nor was an interaction effect (sex of subject x treatment condition) found.

Table 2 summarizes the Ss results on the CRF-S subscales by experimental condition.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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The results of the 2 (sex of subject) x 3 (counselor male/female/unspecified experimental condition) MANOVA on the trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertness subscales of the CRF-S revealed a non-significant main effect for treatment condition, $F(6, 154) = 0.25$, NS; nor was there a significant main effect for sex of subject, $F(3, 78) = 0.96$, NS. A significant interaction effect was found, however, $F(6, 154) = 3.04$, $p<.01$. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed significant (sex of subject by experimental condition) interaction effects for trustworthiness, $F(1, 85) = 3.08$, $p<.05$, and for attractiveness, $F(1, 85) = 8.10$, $p<.05$, but not for expertness.

A Least Squares Difference post hoc analysis clarified the significant subject x counselor interaction. The results of this analysis showed that (a) female Ss in the male counselor condition endorsed trustworthy and attractive items significantly more than males in the male counselor condition, (b) female Ss in the male counselor condition endorsed trustworthy and attractive items significantly more that females in the counselor gender unspecified condition; (c) males in the male counselor condition rated their anticipated male counselor as being less attractive than did the males in the gender unspecified condition, (d) males in the gender unspecified condition rated their counselor as more attractive than did the females in the same condition, and (e) females in the male counselor condition rated their anticipated counselor as more attractive than did females in the female counselor condition (see Figures 1 and 2).



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Insert Figure 1and 2 about here

Table 3 summarized the results of the STAI-S by subject gender and expectation condition (expect to see a counselor vs not expect to see a counselor). Analysis of the STAI-S using a 2 (subject gender) x 2 (expectation condition) ANOVA revealed no significant main effects for sex of subject or for expectation of seeing a counselor; nor was there a significant subject by expectation condition interaction effect.

Insert Table 3 about here

## Discussion

The theory of strategic self-presentation described by Friedlander and Schwartz (1985; also see Strong, 1982 and Strong & Claiborn, 1982) is grounded on the assumption that clients, in an attempt to control the counseling relationship to their liking, will use impression management tactics (e.g., self-promotion, intimidation, supplication) and "strategically" present themselves to counselors in order to achieve personally desired reactions/responses from counselors. Previous research (e.g., Schwartz, et al., 1986) suggests that counselors' impressions of clients can be influenced by client self-presentation strategies. The present study differed from previous studies which have been cited as substantiation of impression management in counseling (e.g., Schwartz et al., 1986; Ward et al., 1985; Beck & Strong, 1982) in that in these previous studies actual client self-presentations have not been investigated; rather, the effect of simulated or contrived self-presentation on counselor impressions have been the focus of study. Although the notion of mutually contingent and reciprocal influence needs to have a starting point for investigation, to date researchers have chosen not to focus on clients' actual behavior, but rather on counselors' responses to possible alternative client self-presentations. Building on this background, the present study sought to investigate the assumption that clients actually do use impression management in an attempt to influence their counselors' perceptions of them.

The results of the study, although mixed, generally suggest (a) that clients indeed may alter their self-presentations (self-descriptions) in order to manipulate

their counselors' impressions of them as clients, and (b) that such strategic self-presentation may be driven by clients' knowledge of their counselors' sex. Although Ss' self-descriptions did not appear to differ between any of the counselor conditions and the no-counselor condition, clients did appear to alter their self-descriptions depending on whether the counselor they were expecting to meet was male or female. Specifically, Ss (regardless of their sex) appeared to engage in significantly less self-promotion and intimidation when expecting to meet with a female counselor. Although it had been hypothesized that we would find differences in the self-presentations of Ss which were dependent on the gender of anticipated counselor (see Deaux, 1977), it was the supplication scale of the IMS on which differences were expected; no hypotheses were offered regarding the self-promotion and intimidation scales. The notion was that the Ss, tailoring their self-presentations to a stereotypic view of women as being more nuturant than men (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972), would describe themselves as more supplicant--complementing a view of a female counselor as more nurturant than a male counselor. Although still conforming to certain social stereotypes, the study found instead that the Ss presented themselves as less intimidating and self-promoting to the anticipated female counselor than to the male counselor. Regardless, it appears that the sex of one's counselor may be of rather immediate concern for clients--at least initially, as it is evidently powerful enough to influence how clients present themselves. Practitioners may do well to consider this finding during initial diagnostic phases of counseling.

That impression management was a function of counselor gender but it was not a function of whether or not the Ss were to meet (or not meet) with a counselor was an interesting finding. Clearly in this study, with whom the subjects were to meet was more salient and powerful than whether or not they were to meet with a counselor at all. This finding may be understood with reference to the findings on the STAI-S. Following the theorizing of Friedlander and Schwartz (1985) and of Deaux and Major (1987) (i.e., that strategic self-presentation would be more likely under conditions of novelty, anxiety or conflict), it was suspected that the anticipation of meeting with an unknown counselor would be sufficiently novel to generate subject anxiety and thus to evoke impression management. Analysis of the STAI-S scores, however, revealed no differences in the Ss' level of state anxiety as a function of whether or not they were to meet with a counselor. Although it cannot be said that this finding supports the view of Friedlander and Schwartz (1985) and of Deaux and


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Major (1987), it certainly appears to conform with it; and these views may help explain the absence of a difference in Ss' self-presentations between the treatment conditions.

Research using the CRF-S has been inconsistent with regard to the importance of client and counselor gender (see Corrigan, et. al, 1980; Heppner & Dixon, 1981). More resent research (see Heppner & Claiborn, 1989) has not found a relationship between counselor gender and CRF-S ratings. In the present study, the CRF-S was completed by Ss prior to an anticipated meeting with a counselor. In this instance, subject and counselor sex did affect initial/anticipatory ratings of the counselor.

Two general findings may be extracted from the results of analysis on the CRF-S. First, Ss were more likely to give higher (or more favorable) ratings to counselors of the opposite sex. More specifically, Ss rated the counselor of their own gender as less trustworthy and less attractive. Second, female subjects were more likely to give higher ratings to counselors whose gender was specified (male or female), whereas males gave higher ratings to counselors whose gender was unspecified. That is to say, the female subjects responded more favorably than males when provided with more information about the gender of their counselor. That these differences in CRF-S ratings corresponded with the use of impression management (as measured by the IMS), may suggest that impression management may have influenced (and thus confounded) Ss' CRF-S ratings. Even though Ss were told that their CRF-S ratings (in contrast to their IMS ratings) were not to be read by their counselor, it is conceivable that Ss may have believed otherwise and thus may have manipulated their ratings to create the impression that they viewed their anticipated counselor as trustworthy and attractive. Although in the present study the CRF-S was completed prior to meeting with a counselor, the possible role of counselor gender as a stimulus evoking impression management on the CRF-S and thus possibly confounding results using that instrument deserves consideration.

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Table 1

IMS Subscale Means and Standard Deviations by Treatment Condition

| Subject gender | Experimental Condition | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | Female | | Unspecified | | No counselor | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Male | | | | | | | | |
| Self-promotion | 16.58 | 9.24 | 12.80 | 5.51 | 20.13 | 8.54 | 23.60 | 7.56 |
| Intimidation | 6.25 | 5.77 | 3.40 | 2.63 | 5.56 | 4.56 | 7.30 | 2.91 |
| Supplication | 4.08 | 1.88 | 3.50 | 1.96 | 4.56 | 1.86 | 3.90 | 1.97 |
| Female | | | | | | | | |
| Self-promotion | 20.65 | 9.55 | 14.21 | 4.04 | 18.40 | 7.83 | 20.81 | 9.15 |
| Intimidation | 6.35 | 4.13 | 4.07 | 1.73 | 5.40 | 3.94 | 6.50 | 3.41 |
| Supplication | 5.30 | 3.16 | 4.57 | 2.41 | 4.53 | 1.81 | 5.63 | 2.94 |

Table 2

CRF-S Subscale Means and Standard Deviations by Treatment Condition

| Subject gender | Experimental Condition | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | Female | | Unspecified | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Male | | | | | | |
| Trustworthiness | 22.00 | 5.20 | 22.70 | 4.03 | 23.69 | 3.88 |
| Attractiveness | 19.75 | 6.41 | 22.10 | 3.75 | 23.16 | 3.67 |
| Expertness | 22.58 | 5.33 | 23.40 | 4.06 | 23.16 | 3.96 |
| Female | | | | | | |
| Trustworthiness | 24.90 | 3.11 | 23.38 | 2.96 | 21.73 | 3.86 |
| Attractiveness | 24.55 | 2.56 | 21.62 | 4.48 | 19.53 | 3.78 |
| Expertness | 24.65 | 3.92 | 25.08 | 3.93 | 23.80 | 2.81 |

Table 3

STAI-S Means and Standard Deviations by Subject Gender and Counselor Expectation Condition

| Expectation Condition | Subject Gender | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | | Female | | |
| | N | M | SD | N | M | SD |
| Counselor | 38 | 37.99 | 9.37 | 49 | 39.78 | 11.95 |
| No Counselor | 10 | 36.90 | 6.32 | 16 | 38.00 | 7.21 |

Figure 1

Mean CRF-S Attractiveness Ratings

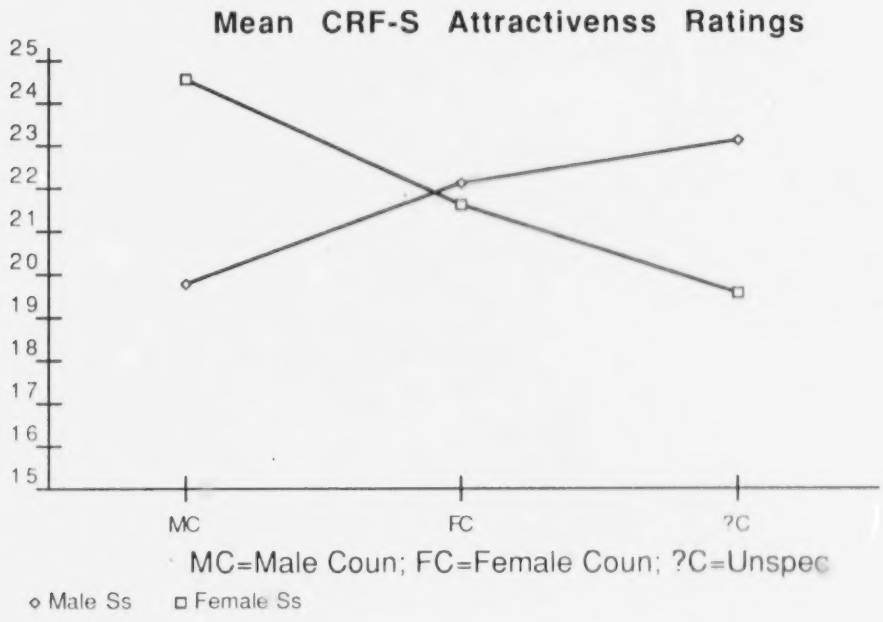

Figure 2

Means CRF-S Trustworthiness Ratings